

A Study on the Subtitle Translation of *A Long Cherished Dream* From the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The documentary is an important medium for crosscultural communication, and its subtitle translation has gradually become increasingly important. The emergence of multimodal discourse analysis theory extends the study of single discourse to multimodal discourse, and at the same time broadens the depth and breadth of subtitle translation research. This paper selects the subtitle translation of the documentary A Long Cherished Dream as a case study for analysis. Based on the multimodal discourse analysis framework proposed by Zhang Delu, this paper explores how translators translate the subtitles according to the coordination of various modalities to convey the overall meaning of the documentary at the cultural level, the contextual level, the content level and the expression level respectively. The main research results are as follows. Firstly, translators should pay attention to cultural phenomena at the cultural level and the literal translation method is usually adopted. Secondly, the translator should consider the contextual background to adopt an addition or omission translation method at the contextual level. Thirdly, the translator can adopt the omission translation method to maximize the complementary effect of the English subtitles and multiple modalities at the content level. This study will be expected to be useful for the subtitle translation study of documentaries.

Key words: Multimodal discourse analysis; Subtitle translation; *A Long Cherished Dream*

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, globalization is becoming increasingly obvious, and the culture of all nationalities in the world shows a trend of deepening exchanges. Cultural openness is very important for a nation-state, especially China, which has a long, splendid civilization. At the same time, as one of the important media of cultural exchange, audiovisual works are widely acknowledged because they are easy to spread and understand. As one type of audiovisual works, documentaries can represent a country's culture and national image. In recent years, China has also launched numerous excellent documentaries, which are widely praised. The research object of this study is the subtitle translation of A Long Cherished Dream. This documentary takes ordinary people and the social reality as its object and records events with a humanistic perspective. It has attracted worldwide attention since its world premiere in Beijing on July 13, 2021, and has been broadcasted in China and abroad from July 15, 2021. Nowadays, multimodal discourse analysis theory has become a more comprehensive perspective for the study of subtitle translation. The translator should also take into account various modalities in the documentary, such as pictures, music, characters' movements, expressions, etc. Based on the multimodal discourse analysis theory proposed by Zhang Delu, this paper intends to study how different modalities coordinate and construct the overall meaning in the process of documentary subtitle translation. At the same time, it can bring some enlightenment to the study of subtitle English translation of Chinese Documentaries.

1. MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

1.1 A Brief Introduction to Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Nowadays, multimodal discourse is ubiquitous in every aspect of the digital information age, and non-verbal modalities can be seen everywhere in daily life. Zhu Yongsheng (2007) proposes the concept of modality and multimodal discourse in his article *Theory and Methodology of Multimodal Discourse Analysis*. In this article, he proposes that modality refers to the channels and media used for communication, including language, technology, image, color, music, and other semiotic systems. Besides, multimodal discourse refers to discourse using two or more modalities at the same time. For example, movies, TV dramas, and short videos are all products of the fusion of various modalities.

Halliday (1978) puts forward the idea that language is a social semiotic, which is the starting point of multimodal discourse theory. Subsequently, Halliday (1985) also describes discourse from the perspective of language meta-function, arguing that discourse completes three meta-functions simultaneously in the process of expression, namely ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function. Subsequently, multimodal discourse analysis theory has been studied in full swing in the West since the 1990s. This theory has been considerably influenced by systemic functional grammar, which believes that language is a social semiotic. Other signs outside of language are also the source of meaning. Zhu Yongsheng (2007) points out that interpreting the meaning of multimodal discourse requires identifying the grammatical relationships between different symbols, as well as figuring out the relationship between words and images. The foundation work of multimodal semiotic analysis is Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design published by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in 1996. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) apply the three meta-functional ideas of systemic functional linguistics to visual image grammar and construct a framework of representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. Accordingly, scholars have gradually begun to attach more importance to the meanings constructed by non-linguistic features. In China, research on multimodal discourse started late. It originated from Li Zhanzi's article Social Semiotic Approach to Multimodal Discourse. Li Zhanzi (2003) introduces the social semiotic approach studied by Kress and Leeuwen. Subsequently, Hu Zhuanglin (2007) discusses the differences between multimodal semiotics and multimedia semiotics. Discourse activities occurring in specific social situations are often multimodal and require a variety of symbolic resources to complete the construction of meaning. Then, Zhang Delu (2009) further

summarizes the comprehensive theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis and expounds on the relationship between each modality in detail. Besides that, Xu Mianjun (2017) sorts out the research results of multimodal translation and proposes that the definition of multimodal translation contains three connotations, namely, translation of multimodal discourse, conversion of different modes in translation, and the application of this theory to translation teaching and practice. These studies provide a new perspective on the study of film and television subtitle translation. Subsequently, professor Zhang Delu (2018) also summarizes the shortcomings in the current multimodal discourse research and further focuses on the context, semiotic systems, the relationship between symbols, and the development of multimodal discourse. After that, Zhang Delu and Zhang Ke (2021) explore the language choice model in the process of Chinese language translation and constructs the model for Chinese language translation from five levels: the context of culture, the context of the situation, discourse semantics, lexicogrammar, and phonology and graphology.

Zhang Delu (2009) proposes a multimodal discourse analysis framework, which is based on the framework of systemic functional linguistics. In this research, Zhang Delu first discusses the media forms that can realize the meaning, including linguistic media and non-linguistic media, and then expounds on the forms of multimodal discourse and their relations (complementary relationship and non-complementary relationship). He also investigates the establishment of grammatical systems for non-linguistic modalities. Based on the above studies, a comprehensive framework of multimodal discourse analysis is proposed, including cultural level, contextual level, content level, and expression level (Zhang, 2009). The framework is relatively complete and comprehensive.

1.2 A Brief Introduction to Subtitle Translation

Audiovisual work, as an important medium, serves as a favorable channel for cross-cultural communication. Subtitle and dubbing are two mainstream forms of film translation. As one of the forms of film translation, dubbing translation has many production constraints such as high cost, long time, technical matters. Later, with the development of society, people have higher requirements for the content conveyed in films and TV dramas. Under the circumstance, subtitle translation may help audiences better appreciate the story and plot in the original works.

Since audiovisual translation was recognized as an independent research field in 1995, it is now in full swing in the western translation field (Liu, 2010). It can be noticed that the most notable of audiovisual translation studies is the subtitle translation (Munday, 2014). In general, there are two kinds of subtitles: intralingual subtitles and interlingual subtitles. The so-called "subtitle translation" refers to the translation of interlingual

subtitles, which is to translate the source words into the target language while preserving the original sound of the film and television, and then superimposing the target language on the bottom of the screen (Li, 2001). Xiao Weiqing (2017) also points out that subtitles also include other information to help the audience understand the dialogue, such as characters, words, road signs, notices, etc.

Compared with other forms of translation, subtitle translation has different characteristics and limiting factors. Zhang Chunbai (1998) and Qian Shaochang (2000) discuss the characteristics of subtitle translation. Based on the viewpoints of the scholars, the characteristics of subtitle translation can be summarized as the following five features. The first feature is the space and time constraints. Transient subtitles must be concise and accurate (Cheng, 2014). The second feature is popularity. Subtitle content should not be too elegant or too obscure (Qian, 2000). The third feature is the absence of annotations. In film and television translation, translators should not add superfluous information in the translated film for annotations, otherwise, the audience cannot catch the information in a short time (Qian, 2000). Fourth, subtitle translation experiences the conversion from spoken language to written language (Li, 2001). Subtitles should be made of common words and phrases that are easy to understand, and the translator should ensure that the audience can effortlessly grasp the main idea of the statement. Fifth, one feature that also needs to be made clear is that non-verbal symbols are also an important part of the construction of meaning. The presence of intermediate information between the original text and the translated text, i.e., images, sounds and soundtracks, also affects the subtitle translation (Cheng, 2014).

1.3 Documentary Subtitle Translation

People define documentaries in different perspectives and ways, but the core of the discussion is always the issue of authenticity (Wang, 2013). Bill Nichol (2010) proposes the definition of documentary, believing that the narrator of the documentary should be a real person. Nie Xinru (2018) discusses the classification of documentaries. There are some distinct classification models when discussing documentaries. For example, in China, some scholars divide documentaries into "humanistic social documentaries" and "historical science and educational documentaries". In addition, Bill Nichols (2001) divides documentaries into six modes: poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, performative in his book Introduction to Documentary. This classification is highly recognized in documentary research. In addition, Song Xiaoxue (2012) proposes a more common classification, that is, documentaries can be divided into news documentaries, historical and cultural documentaries, docudrama, humanities and social documentaries, natural science and technology documentaries, and anthropology documentaries.

Documentary subtitle translation and film subtitle translation have similar characteristics. In the translation process, the subtitles are subject to time and space constraints on the screen and the language needs to be easy to understand. However, due to the variety of documentaries, the study of documentary subtitle translation needs to be combined with the individual characteristics of documentaries. Li Rengang (2010) points out that to realize the authenticity of documentaries, documentary makers at home and abroad have found a better way, that is, the characters in the films act as narrators. This gives a great deal of authenticity to the narrative and a more realistic representation of what the characters are thinking. The narrative content of the characters in the documentary constitutes the whole commentary. Luo Yan (2017) points out that commentary has unique linguistic characteristics, that is, commentary language should be objective, accurate, concise, and comprehensive.

2. INTRODUCTION OF A LONG CHERISHED DREAM

Building a moderately prosperous society in all respects is a great feat in China's development, which also contains countless stories of ordinary people. Since July 15, 2021, the documentary *A Long Cherished Dream* has been broadcasted at home and abroad. The documentary records the stories of ordinary Chinese people from an international perspective. The documentary tells four stories about village party secretary Chang Kaiyong, truck driver Zhang Lin, acrobatic performer Wang Huaifu, and pioneers of the private express delivery enterprise from Zixu village. These vivid and realistic stories profoundly reveal Chinese wisdom. The quality of the subtitle translation has a great significance on whether it can tell Chinese stories and present a good image of China.

The research object of this study is the subtitle translation of A Long Cherished Dream, which is a humanistic and social documentary. The source language of this documentary is Chinese. This documentary takes ordinary people and the social reality as its object and records events with a humanistic perspective. This documentary takes an everyday perspective and straightforwardly tells the story. Compared with written language, the language of A Long Cherished Dream is closer to the language of daily life and more real. Different from science and education documentaries, the language is composed of the protagonist's monologue and dialogue with others. High-quality documentaries cannot be disseminated without subtitle translation. Documentaries reflect reality, so the process of subtitle translation should be rigorous while combining the characteristics of subtitle translation. At the same time, translators are required to adopt appropriate translation methods combining the language, image, sound, and other elements in documentaries to ensure that audiences can better receive the information.

3. STUDY ON THE SUBTITLE TRANSLATION OF *A LONG CHERISHED DREAM* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Zhang Delu (2009) summarizes the comprehensive theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis. It includes four levels: cultural level, contextual level, content level, and expression level. Based on this theoretical framework, this chapter will study the subtitle translation of the documentary *A Long Cherished Dream* from the above four levels with some examples, and then analyze how different modalities interact with each other coordinately to convey the overall meaning of the original work.

3.1 The Cultural Level

Zhang Delu (2009) points out that the cultural level is the key level that makes multimodal communication possible. The traditions, forms, and methods of discourse are determined by the cultural level. In addition, the cultural level is composed of ideology and genre. Ideology is composed of people's thinking patterns, philosophy of life, living habits, and all the tacit rules of society. Genre realizes the communicative procedures or structural potential that can realize the ideology. Subsequently, Zhang Delu and Zhang Ke (2021) find that the differences in history and cultural traditions between China and the target language countries give rise to different characteristics of cultural elements in the discourse, and the focus of verbal communication is how the Chinese cultural elements are handled in the translation process. All the communicative scenes in this documentary unfold in the cultural context of the Chinese story, and the discourse contains many cultural elements with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, the translator should focus on the cultural phenomenon in the subtitles, so as not to make the English subtitles unintelligible. Translators often choose the literal translation method, thus ensuring that the subtitles are concise and the cultural elements of the source language are retained.

Example 1:

Episode	1 A	ROOM	0F	THEIR	OWN
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Time codes	Chinese	English
	2020年了/我们小干溪	In 2020, our village will
00:04:18	村和整个彝良县/要进	be part of the 'Rural
	入振兴乡村计划	Revitalization' Plan.

In the first episode, the protagonist Chang Kaiyong is the Party Secretary of Little Creek Village. He is responsible for poverty alleviation in one of the remotest areas in China, which is the hinterland of the Wumeng Mountain at the junction of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan. In China, poverty alleviation is a grand and arduous task and is also an important strategic plan. Some viewers abroad may not be aware that this is a policy of the Chinese government. The translator should consider the time and space limitations in subtitle translation. Instead of adding annotations, the translator literally translates "振兴乡村" as 'Rural Revitalization'. The literal translation method here not only follows the concise characteristics of subtitle translation but also adds quotation marks to the special cultural elements in the English subtitle, highlighting the fact that "Rural Revitalization" is a special policy of China to avoid foreign viewers' incomprehension.

Example 2:

Episode 1 A ROOM OF THEIR OWN

Chinese	English
	One was on the 'Pig Killing Day'.

In example 2, the cultural element of "杀猪饭" appears in the original subtitle. Since ancient times in China, there has been a traditional custom of killing the pigs for the Chinese New Year, and before killing the pigs, people usually do some simple ritual activities. Therefore, the annual pig-killing dinner represents the culture and lifestyle of the agriculture civilization. The annual pigkilling dinner near the Chinese Lunar New Year also means a reward for the family's hard work throughout the year. It is traditionally believed that excessive punctuation marks may affect the cleanliness and aesthetics of subtitles to a large extent. However, some punctuation marks can be used appropriately in the subtitle translation, such as quotation marks, parentheses, dashes, and so on. In the example where the protagonist celebrates the Spring Festival in the countryside, the translator translates the "杀猪饭那天" into 'Pig Killing Day' and adds quotation marks to express the sense of ceremony of this activity and the traditional Chinese culture.

3.2 The Contextual Level

Contextual level means that discourse is restricted by context factors, including field of discourse, mode of discourse, and tenor of discourse (Zhang, 2009). In addition to the context of the film, the translation should also consider the audience's real social and cultural context. This can be divided into linguistic context, situational context, and cultural context (Hu, 2007). In the process of subtitle translation, translators should consider the cohesiveness of the context to make appropriate adjustments, additions, and omissions to the subtitles. The choice of specific words should also be combined with the context to avoid ambiguity.

Example 3:

Episode 4	THE	TIE	THAT	BINDS
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Time codes	Chinese	English
00:02:26- 00:02:30	人伍子胥弃楚奔 越,路过桐庐境	Zixu village is named after Wu Zixu, a famous historical figure who passed through the territory while fleeing the Chu Kingdom over 2,000 years ago.

The fourth episode tells the story of the pioneers of the private express delivery enterprise from Zixu village. The pioneers seize the opportunity, help each other and eventually become successful in their business. They also contribute to the construction of their hometown. The field of discourse in this episode focuses on conveying the Chinese concept of survival and the quality of independence. At the beginning of the fourth episode, explanatory content appears on the screen, briefly introducing the location of this episode's story. Here, the subtitles simply convey the origin of Zixu's name and briefly introduce the location of the story without elaborating on Chinese history and allusions. The English translation of the subtitles here takes the context into account and omits details of "奔越" "楚国人" "在中国古 代", uses "a famous historical figure" in place of a more detailed historical and cultural representation. What's else, The translator also translates the place name "桐庐" into "territory", following the principle of simplicity in subtitles translation.

Example 4:

Episode	1 A	ROOM	OF	THEIR OWN	r
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Time codes	Chinese	English
00:24:39- 00:24:41	第一次喝酒	It's the first time I get a drink with you.

In the example here, the protagonist of the first episode Chang Kaiyong toasts his wife to express his gratitude for her hard work for the family at the New Year's Eve dinner. Chinese people are accustomed to omitting some detailed information when speaking, but according to the context and the character of Chang Kaiyong's shy personality, his expressions and actions in the picture, the translator adopts the translation method of addition. In order to make it easier for foreign viewers to understand the plot and relationships between the characters, the translator adds some information to the target subtitles, which means that "This is the first time Chang Kaiyong drinks with his wife" instead of "The first time Chang Kaiyong drinks". This is where the context is taken into account and an addition translation method is adopted.

3.3 The Content Level

The content level includes meaning level and form level. Firstly, at the meaning level, it is the ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning restricted by the field of discourse, tenor of discourse, and mode of discourse (Zhang, 2009). The translator needs to understand the overall meaning of the documentary and convey the meaning to the audience in the form of subtitles combined with other modalities. At the form level, the formal features of different modalities are correlated with each other to reflect the discourse meaning (Zhang, 2009). Each modality has its formal system, such as visual grammar, auditory grammar, etc. Translators should pay attention to the non-verbal modalities in documentaries, such as images, background music, facial expressions, and the actions of characters.

In fact, due to the limitation of subtitle length and time, translators usually adopt the omission translation method with various modalities complementing each other to convey meaning, which also follows the principle of concise subtitle translation. The translator does not need to transliterate every word. Therefore, subtitles with fast dialogue speed, semantic repetition, or weak relevance should be simplified in the process of subtitle translation.

Example 5:

Episode	1A	ROOM	OF	THEIR	OWN
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Time codes	Chinese	English
00:06:04- 00:06:12	在那个地点还给你们找 公益性岗位/要是嫌公益 性岗位工资低/还有专门 的扶贫车间	

Example 6:

Episode 1 A ROOM OF THEIR OWN

Time codes	Chinese	English
00:17:56- 00:18:02	房间也是很大的/厕所很 近也不远/一出门转个弯 就到了	The rooms are large. It's very convenient.

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Episode 1 A ROOM OF THEIR OWN

Time codes	Chinese	English
00:18:03- 00:18:24	好是好/好是好/等你们去了 我才去/你爷爷身体痛/我们 俩确实有点老/你们走了/你 爸爸可能要跟着走了/把他 一个人丢在这里吗/那要去 不去	The place sounds very good but if you all go then your grandpa will be left alone here. What if he got sick with nobody around?

Example 8:

Episode 2 DRIVE LIKE A GIRL

Time codes	Chinese	English
00:06:24- 00:06:31	他跑泉州到荆州/三天一 个来回/然后我跑福建到 浙江的话/两天一个来回	His route is three days for a roundtrip. Mine is two days for a roundtrip.

In example 5, village official Chang Kaiyong visits one family to persuade them to move out of their dilapidated

houses. He speaks the local dialect quickly and presents a lot of reasons to get the family to agree. The translator just needs to convey the meaning that the relocation site is very convenient and the job opportunities are abundant. Thus, some information is omitted in the English subtitles, such as "要是嫌公益性岗位工资低". Similarly, in example 6, the young daughter who moved to a new house is telling her grandmother about the new living environment. The translator chooses to omit the details "厕 所很近也不远" and "出门转个弯就到了" in the original text and summarizes it as "It's very convenient". In the seventh example, grandma said she doesn't want to move because she was too old. Here, the audience can easily relate the subtitles and the gloomy look of grandma in the video to grasp the overall meaning of the plot. Therefore, the English subtitles of grandma's words are condensed into one sentence "What if he got sick with nobody around?" which summarizes what grandma is trying to express. Similarly, in example 8, the names of Chinese places "泉州", "荆州", "福建", "浙江", are omitted in the English subtitles.

Example 9:

Episode 1 A ROOM OF THEIR OWN

Time codes	Chinese	English
00:02:30- 00:02:35	昭通市地处云贵川三省结 合部的乌蒙山区腹地,是 中国最贫困地区之一。	Deep in the mountains, Zhaotong is one of the poorest areas in China.



Figure 1 Screenshot of example nine at the content level.

In this example, the geographical location and background of the story are introduced at the beginning of the first episode. The subtitles are placed in the middle of the screen as the introduction, and the scene on the screen shows the overlapping mountains and clouds. In the subtitles, the detailed information of "地处云贵川三 省结合部的乌蒙山区腹地" is reduced to "Deep in the mountains", which makes the translation more concise. Foreign audiences do not need to know the specific location, and they just need to know that the story is set in a poor mountainous area of China. At the same time, the English subtitles are reduced to one line and the visual effect is better. (See Figure 1)

Example 10: Episode 2 DRIVE LIKE A GIRL

Time codes	Chinese	English	
00:05:54- 00:06:00	他开那个大货车/开得太 帅了/你晓得不/真的太帅 了/当时就犯花痴/晓得不	He looked so cool driving big trucks. I liked him right away.	

The main character of the second episode Lin Bao is a very lively and talkative girl. In this example, she recalls the scene when she met her husband Zhang Xun. The term "犯花痴" describes a state of intense infatuation with attractive members of the opposite sex. There is no literal translation of "犯花痴" here. Instead, the translator translates it as "I liked him right away", which adds "right away" according to the scene of the context and Lin Bao's excited tone and intonation. That means she falls in love with Zhang Xun right away.

Example 11:

Episode 4 THE TIE THAT BINDS

Time codes	Chinese	English
00:26:48-	写 "君"字啊/"君"	Should I write this character?
00:26:51	超简单	Yeah it's pretty easy.



Figure 2

Screenshot of example eleven at the content level.

This is a dialogue between a father and his daughter as they are practicing calligraphy. The character "君" in calligraphy is also shown in the picture. (See Figure 2) The English subtitle "Should I write this character" here is the result of the combination of the information of the picture and subtitles, which realizes the complementary relationship at the form level and gives the audience a good cognitive experience. Here, the visual modality and the subtitles interact with each other, and they are complementary to construct the whole meaning for the audience.

3.4 The Expression Level

Expression level includes linguistic media and nonlinguistic media. The linguistic media includes pure language and para-language. The non-linguistic media includes the communicator's physical actions and nonphysical actions, such as tools and the environment (Zhang, 2009). In addition to pure language factors, translators should also consider the influence of paralanguage factors and non-language factors on the overall meaning of the film, such as the size of subtitles, the use of background music, the layout of screen space, body movements of characters, etc. Specifically speaking, translators can pay attention to the abbreviation form, the capital form, the spatial layout of subtitles, and punctuation in subtitles. Besides, subtitles must be synchronized with sound and images due to time constraints (Yao & Cai, 2010). Chinese and English bilingual subtitles format can export documentaries to foreign countries and be suitable for foreign language learners in China.

Subtitles include other information on the screen in addition to the dialogue or narration presented at the bottom of the film screen. Most of the protagonists appearing in this documentary are introduced with detailed information next to the image of the character, including name, occupation, etc. (See Figure 3) The English translation is in similar font size and length to the source language, and the spatial layout of the letters is aesthetically pleasing and concise, allowing the viewer to quickly capture the message the source language is trying to convey.



Figure 3 Screenshot at the expression level

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this paper analyzes the subtitle translation of A Long Cherished Dream based on the four levels of the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis proposed by Zhang Delu. This paper draws a conclusion that the English subtitles have successfully conveyed various elements of the documentary to overseas audiences. According to the subtitle translation research of A Long Cherished Dream, the main research results are as follows. Firstly, translators need to pay attention to cultural phenomena and adopt appropriate translation methods in the process of subtitle translation. In this study, the literal translation method is usually used for cultural elements to better preserve the cultural elements in the source language while considering the principle of concise subtitles. Secondly, the translator should also consider the contextual background to adopt an addition or omission translation method at the contextual level. Thirdly, in the case of multimodal interactions between subtitles, images and sound, the translator can adopt the omission translation method to maximize the complementary effect of the English subtitles and the multiple modalities in the documentary. In a word, through the successful subtitle translations, audiences can experience the charm of ordinary Chinese people who struggle and pursue happiness. Furthermore, the audience around the world can view China's development comprehensively and rationally.

This paper, however, is more concerned with the combination of linguistic modalities with visual and auditory modalities. Future research can explore the influence of other modalities on subtitle translation, and try to explore a more scientific theoretical framework suitable for subtitle translation of multimodal audiovisual works.

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